

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2004 Interim

August 25, 2004

The 2nd meeting of the Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education of the Interim Joint Committee on Education was held on Wednesday, August 25, 2004, at 9:40 AM, at Buckner Elementary School in Oldham County Senator Lindy Casebier, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Jim Thompson, Co-Chair; Senators Brett Guthrie, David K. Karem, and Jerry Rhoads; Representatives Tim Feeley, Derrick Graham, Harry Moberly, and Frank Rasche.

Guests: Wayne Young, Kentucky Association of School Administrators; Carl Rollins, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority; Starr Lewis, Bonnie Brinly, Linda France, and Kevin Noland, Kentucky Department of Education; Faurest Coogle; Roland Haun, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents; Kristy Stanifer, Education Professional Standards Board; Board Chair Linda Theiss, Board Vice chairman Joyce Fletcher, and Jim Patrick, Oldham County Schools.

LRC Staff: Chuck Truesdell, Audrey Carr, Sandy Deaton, Jonathan Lowe, Janet Stevens, Lisa Moore, Jerry Lunney, and Jo Ann Paulin.

Senator Casebier said the minutes of the last meeting would not be approved because there wasn't a quorum. He welcomed everyone to Buckner Elementary School. He gave a special thanks to Ms. Lisa Cheek, the principal of Buckner Elementary School, and the PTA president. He said all the work they did to prepare for the visit today was very much appreciated. Senator Casebier said there were three special guests here today from North Oldham High School who are working on their senior projects. He introduced Meredith Geers, Tyler Foote, and Ally Bird and he asked them to stand and be recognized. He said that Meredith's senior project is on education, Tyler and Allie were focusing on politics. Throughout their senior year they are going to be working closely with the education and political processes.

Senator Casebier said Superintendent Blake Haselton could not be here today because he is at Western Kentucky University. Board Chair Linda Theiss and Vice

chairman Joyce Fletcher were present. Ms. Harrie Buecker, Assistant Superintendent of Oldham County Schools discussed the program 2020 Vision and what the district is doing instructionally and how it focused on writing and other aspects to move the curriculum ahead.

Ms. Harrie Buecker thanked the committee for their hard work on behalf of the educators in the district. The student population grows by about 500 students a year and they could open a school each year and still be behind. This year there are 440 new students. They are on schedule to have three new schools opened in the 2005 - 2006 school year. She said that she was going to talk about the 2020 Vision and what they are doing in Oldham County.

Ms. Buecker had distributed a folder with a Power Point presentation that outlined the program and that folder is a part of this record. Four years ago she was asked by Superintendent Haselton to put together a program for what the students need to be able to do in the year 2020. They narrowed it down to the fact that they wanted the students to be good at critical thinking, making informed decisions, and being adaptable to change.

First they had to decide what were the essential questions that they always want to address when making decisions about allocating resources within the district. The essential question was, "How does the use of this resource improve student performance in a measurable way over a continuous period of time?". She said they feel that if they are going to make a commitment to a specific program, they want to be able to accurately measure its effect to help them know what positive impact this has on students. Next they wanted the 2020 Vision to be student centered, data driven, and always striving for continuous improvement. She said when she was hired the superintendent asked her to keep their test scores rising.

The framework for Oldham County Schools is to maintain the focus of the 2020 Vision. She said her experience around the state was that some students are not being successful. You always start with an assessment and knowing what you want your students to be able to accomplish. You then arrive at an assessment that mirrors that vision. All the students from preschool to twelfth grade have to be successful and competitive on these kinds of assessments. From the assessment they go to the curriculum and then to how they deliver instruction to meet the needs of all the students. They then move to evaluation which is looking at what skills and needs the teachers have and where they are not doing so well. They will then make a plan to address this need. The evaluation becomes the needs assessment for professional development. They found this was a good model seven years ago and they continue to use it now.

Another thing they embrace is the effective schools correlates. They think these correlates give a good foundation on how to do everything else since they include: a) a clear and focused mission; b) instructional leadership; c) opportunity to learn/time on

task; d) safe and orderly environment; e) home-school relations; f) frequent monitoring of student progress; and g) high expectations.

The next characteristic that will contribute to the 2020 Vision is the primary attributes which are for all the grades. Ms. Buecker said the bulleted items under these attributes are: a) developmentally appropriate practices; b) continuous progress; c) multiage/multi-ability classes; d) authentic assessment; e) qualitative reporting; f) professional teamwork; and g) positive parent involvement.

If there is going to be a 2020 Vision it needs to be a shared vision. Everyone in the district would have to have the same vision, guidelines, and beliefs. Ms. Buecker said they felt that in order to do that there would have to be some collective inquiry or creative thinking. Everyone would have to work together as a collaborative team. Most of this information was gotten from working with the professional learning community.

Ms. Buecker said how they get the work done is on the last page of her handout. The chart explains how building leadership, developing and implementing assessment, curriculum and instruction, and analyzing the results would improve student performance through professional growth and development. There continues to be challenges. They went from having 50 English as Second Language students four years ago to about 280 at present which includes 22 different languages. Students involved in special education services range from 15 to 20 percent of the student population. Although those numbers aren't increasing each year, what is increasing is the tremendous needs of the students who are in these programs. They also have increasing numbers of students who qualify for free and reduced lunches. There are five prisons in the area so there are many people who move into the community to be close to those in the prisons which means there is high mobility for this district.

Another feather in their cap, Ms. Buecker said, is the preschool. They have over 300 students and almost every one of those students is on an Individual Education Plan for special education services or qualifies for free or reduced lunch. They feel they are meeting the needs of these at-risk students by getting them at an early age. The district is in support of this program.

Ms. Buecker said that one thing that was a new initiative for them this year was the GAP intervention process. An example of the administrator implementation checklist is a part of the packet that was distributed. She said that girls out perform the boys in their schools. They want to know why this is and want they can do to get a handle on this. In some schools they are seeing that the disparity between special education students and regular students is shrinking. They want to know why that is happening and how they can replicate those types of programs in other schools. They are looking at each school having a GAP coordinator and team. They want to make sure they are paying attention to what all their students are doing and how they are progressing.

Representative Rasche asked what is a mathematics portfolio. Ms. Buecker said they felt the process of math portfolios was very valid to what the students needed to know so they kept them in the district after the state did away with them in the state assessment. Also they maintain a writing and a mathematics portfolio at all grade levels. Two years ago they rewrote the mathematics portfolio in order to get more leverage and impact on the students' performance. It is now called MORC which stands for Mathematics Open Response Curriculum. In October or September when the scores come back they will look to see how it has impacted test scores.

Representative Rasche asked if they reflect the open-response item. Ms. Buecker said yes, it does. All students must have a writing and math portfolio. Oldham County Middle School has the highest writing index and they have a lot to share. They worked with the principal a couple of years ago on the initiative where she would collect the working folders and would give them back to the teachers with annotated notes on the things they needed to do to improve. That has gone a long way because they know the leadership is taking an active role.

The middle school team is often asked to go to other counties to help. One county, Marion County, moved up 40 spots on the assessment last year. One thing they saw was that some separate out working on portfolios from instruction. They should be integrated in the work students do. Ms. Buecker introduced two National Board Certified Teachers, Ms. Candi Ramsey, a science teacher, and Ms. Candy Thomas, a language arts teacher who work together on creating portfolios with seventh graders. They both started teaching in 1990 and have always worked under the components and strands of the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

Ms. Ramsey said she had a science middle school degree, masters in science education, and she was national board certified in early and middle school science. She is beginning her 15 year teaching middle school science. Ms. Thomas said she has 10 years as a language arts teacher and 15 years as the school resource teacher, and she received her national board certification in 2000.

Ms. Ramsey said some might think why do you need to know how to write in science or what does writing have to do with science. Most people would think that it has nothing to do with science. As most adults came through school they did very little writing in science. She asked if any one on the committee had read anything about medical breakthroughs, the latest diets, or maybe cancer or drug research. Those are all examples of science writing. In all these writings there was research that had to be done. They do research on new automobiles or appliances for the Consumer Report. A major thing in science is collecting data and using that real data to figure something out or solve problems or use it in real life. Of course students are not interested in medical breakthroughs or buying a car, but they are interested in things like food, skateboarding,

hair products, and other types of items. When they have ownership it is authentic for them. Ms. Ramsey has them choose an item of their interest and do an authentic investigation. She brought some student projects for the committee to view. They are a part of this record. Based on consumer testing, the samples were produced by three students. One was male and the other two were female. They do research by going to the grocery store and by looking for data on the internet. They then actually design the test and use quantitative data, using a rating scale, and then do a blind taste test. All the testing is done in the classroom. They take the test, correct their data, printout their scale, then turn that into a graph showing the scores. They turn these into consumer report articles. Not only do they get to do an authentic investigation and use the technology that is required, not just the word processing, but they actually graph (line graph, circle graph, and pie graph). They also use computer internet research skills. They learn word processing such as embedding pictures and technology skills they are going to use, no matter what type work they do. Most people use these techniques in their jobs daily. When students then buy something or read about a product, the goal is that they are then able to be an educated scientist and consumer. We do it everyday and it is a natural fit. The two teachers decided they should come up with a collaborative model that would complement the two subjects and it has been very successful.

Ms. Thomas said that Ms. Ramsey was already doing these types of investigations in her classroom so the writing piece was a natural extension of the curriculum in her class. As a writing resource teacher Ms. Thomas said she tries to help teachers see that you don't stop instruction to do a portfolio. It should naturally fit the instruction that is already happening in the classroom. She said it was amazing what these children can write.

Ms. Ramsey said that in the past the students have produced videos on earthquake awareness week. Some students have written brochures that have been produced and have been sent home to parents. There are a variety of things that can be done. The two teachers, as they prepared for the presentation, discussed how important it is for students to write self-reflection and self-analysis in getting to know themselves. This is something that kids do anyway, so why not help them improve on it? They don't have to be excellent writers but the more they write the better they get.

Representative Thompson said that he taught middle school six years. He said he taught in the 1970's when junior high schools were becoming middle schools. Research then showed that middle school kids were quite unique and their needs were different both intellectually and physically. With middle school scores being what they are generally, he said in his county they are the largest concern. He asked if there is a danger with the middle school students of bringing back that same junior high mentality and pressures to push middle school students to succeed. He asked how can this be guarded against or if this was an area of concern.

Ms. Ramsey said she didn't think the students would let them go back because they are so different with the technology they have and the lives they lead. She said she sees students doing things that she didn't think about doing until she was in college. Ms. Ramsey said she thinks it is because of the way the students are being taught that they don't feel pressure. They meet expectations, and studies are made relevant to their lives.

Ms. Buecker said they believe everything begins with the relationship the teacher has with the student. The students have to know that you care before they care what you know. They always begin with building rapport with the child. High expectations are set and they make sure the students have the support they need to meet these expectations. If there is a nurturing environment then children don't feel the stress.

Ms. Ramsey said that as a teacher she is responsible for helping the students compile and put together their portfolios. She said there are a lot of revisions that are done but most of the work can be done in class.

Senator Karem asked if the teachers get resistance from parents who want their students to write grammatically like they did as students. Ms. Thomas said that is a real issue because in her life experience the teachers graded for grammatical errors and not content. The teachers work with the individuals that have problems in certain areas of grammar and stress more than just the writing.

Ms. Ramsey said the first thing is to get the students to put words on the paper. She said if you can get the thoughts on paper then they can work with the grammatics. She related her own's daughter's experience in first grade when she couldn't spell but she was writing pages and pages. The teacher reminded her that if her daughter had to look up a word before she wrote it then she would use more simple words. It was more important to get her daughter's thoughts on paper and then later on she would learn to spell them correctly.

Senator Karem said that was exactly right. He asked if the parents resist having their children express their thoughts. Parents are a bit nervous about children expressing too many of their personal thoughts and think what business is it of the teachers and the school to promote this type of writing.

Ms. Thomas said most parents don't read their children's papers and she had not come up against that type of resistance. Ms. Ramsey said their writings are confidential. Ms. Thomas said the students are exploring themselves and developing their personalities. Usually when parents see the writings they are amazed. They don't understand sometimes the complexity of their children's thoughts.

Senator Casebier said they know it is working because the presidents of U of L and UK are saying the level of students coming in are much better prepared than in years past. Ms. Buecker said that many of the students can bypass English 101 and 102. Senator Casebier said he wanted the members of this subcommittee to see that through leadership, it is working and it can work in other areas of the state.

Ms. Buecker introduced Mr. Dan Orman and Mr. Steve Emerson to explain the instructional practices in the Buckner Alternative High School.

Mr. Orman, the Assistant Superintendent of Oldham County Schools, said that this was the tenth year for the alternative school. When they opened the doors on August 28, 1995, it was a survival test. Support from the board and from the legislature with school safety initiatives has been the reason for the success of this program. This center focuses on improvement and is data driven. The first year they had 41 physical restraints on students. At one point they were wearing blue jeans and tee shirts to work to prevent good clothes from being ripped up. Mr. Orman said now he can wear a tie and not have it used against him. They haven't had a fight in three plus years. There hasn't been a physical restraint in quite a number of years. The reason for this is what goes on in the classrooms. They have teachers now that are student focused with a complete mode of continuous improvement. Alternative schools have a different set of standards that make them effective. All that has to be done is to make what is going on in the classroom more interesting than the activities the students can create. It has to be more interesting and more engaging. He said that Steve Emerson is that kind of teacher. Mr. Orman said they went from having 21 students on the first day of school to having well over 100 by October 12. They can serve students instructionally by having teachers like Mr. Emerson. He said the data is not about having fights this week or about restraining students but the focus everyday is about how do you take apprentices and turn them into proficient writers and proficient mathematicians.

Mr. Emerson said the teachers couldn't do what they do without a great board. The support allows them to be creative and allows the freedom to work with the students. Every teacher is driven by the students. The teachers work with the instructional support team. Two years ago Buckner Alternative School had over 50 percent novice and this year there was zero novice and they had their first distinguished writer. They created a mission statement of "No excuses." They had it everywhere and they continually tell their students that they have to find a way to get it done. In the past, high expectations were not placed on the students. Students know now they are going to be held accountable. Mr. Emerson said the block scheduling has allowed him to work with the students on their portfolios. This was a great help. People tend to underestimate these students. They are passionate, emotional, and they have a lot to say. Given that opportunity to put it down on paper, it just comes out in volumes although sometimes it is very sad. It is for them a therapeutic process. First you have to build trust because they come with a lot of scars and do not trust. Mr. Emerson said he knew each and every

student on a personal level. He tries to personalize the writing process for them and build on their strengths. There are several published poets in the school. He said they are very proud of their students.

Ms. Buecker said the alternative school is helping with the gender issues because 59 percent of the students are male.

Representative Moberly asked how long would a student usually stay in the alternative school. Mr. Orman said the normal model is usually two days to six weeks or nine weeks. He said they have students who look forward to getting out at the semester break. They also have other students that are affectionately termed as "lifers." They come in sometimes in seventh grade and stay until graduation. They graduated two students last June. It just depends on the students. What happens in many schools is that a student will come in and really do well with the personal approach. The instruction is appropriate for them, and they begin to succeed but then are told they have to leave after a few weeks. They don't want to, but because of the rules they are forced to leave. They end up getting in trouble again so they can return. The message they want to send to the students is that if you are good and are smart, you can stay in the program if you choose to do so. That change has created some growth.

Representative Moberly asked Mr. Orman if he felt the success rate was high. Mr. Orman said it wasn't high enough if they continue to lose students. He said they lost a student today that decided to withdraw because he was 19 and life had kicked in for him. He didn't have anywhere to stay and he has to work two jobs. They hope to find another route for this student.

Representative Moberly asked what would be the effect on the school system and the children they serve if there were not an alternative school. Mr. Orman said that was a question for the other schools to answer. He said teacher salaries might be increased by a half of a percent if there weren't an alternative school. A principal called and asked for a printout of students from her school. She then was able to tell the teachers they were going to get the 28 students back if the alternative school closed. That seemed to cease the conversation about salary increases. The alternative school creates a win-win situation: students are not disrupting classes and you move them to an environment where they can be successful. Therein lies the challenge.

Representative Moberly commended Mr. Orman and Mr. Emerson for what they are doing. He said he believes in the value of alternative schools. He said he was the sponsor of the School Safety Act in 1998 and he wanted to salute Senator Casebier for his help getting it passed in the Senate.

Representative Graham said he teaches high school and he wanted to know when is the decision made that the student will not go back to a regular class and what are some

reasons for making a student stay in the alternative system. Mr. Orman said in his experience, first and foremost it is if a student says, "I am not going back." In other cases a child may not want to go back but the teachers know the student well enough to know he or she might succeed in that environment. He said that on occasion they are wrong but the door is never locked for students to come back. Usually cases in which students are into drug trafficking or have severe reading problems or learning disabilities would be reasons for staying in the alternative class. In high school, it is just not cool not to be able to read. They have no self-contained classes. They work very closely with the court system and law enforcement agencies in the district. Mr. Emerson said a critical aspect is communication with the home school. Nothing is ever done without a committee approach, including talking with parents, administrators, and students. Sometimes the student gets cut out of the process and it is very important to hear what they have to say. Mr. Orman said they have many students that spend part of the day in a traditional class.

Representative Graham asked what was the socio-economic background of the students attending the alternative school. Mr. Orman said that 14.5 percent of the students are at or below the poverty level in Oldham County. He said 40 to 44 percent of students in the alternative school are at or below the poverty level. School is a lot tougher when you come from a very challenging background.

Representative Graham said that Franklin County has an alternative school and one thing that has brought grumblings is the test scores. When the scores from the alternative schools are included with the scores of the home school, scores have gone down, when the home school could have made or exceeded what they were asked to attain without them. Representative Graham asked if they had experienced that problem. Mr. Emerson said they have plenty of great schools and they had that grumbling a few years ago. There is no secret pattern for instructional practices. They are able to share those in the district and that has been a tremendous help.

Representative Graham asked if they had been able to get the teachers from North and South Oldham to work with the instructors of the alternative school so as to be a cooperative effort. Mr. Emerson said everyone had embraced the program. Ms. Buecker said the home schools were very happy to have the portfolios come back with good scores. Representative Graham commended them for their effort. He said they are dealing not only with the educational background but with the problems that go with society. Mr. Emerson said it is the notion of school safety from within that starts in the classroom that makes a difference. The reason they have a safe school with no fights, no physical restraints is because of the instruction going on in the classroom. It has to start with having a trust level and effective instruction. They are the key elements.

Representative Feeley said he was sorry there weren't more committee members here to hear this presentation. Unfortunately he said they were preaching to the choir

because everyone around the table is a supporter of the program. He said ten years ago when Dr. Haselton brought the proposal to the Oldham County Board of Education he was a member of the board. It took \$261 thousand to establish this program. He said he reluctantly voted for it because his point of view at the time as a board member and a parent was this is going to make the other schools better by getting rid of the problem cases. It was at that meeting that he first met Dan Orman and since then he has followed his progress and the progress of Buckner Alternative School. He said that he has now been converted because the program that he thought would be good for the other schools ended up being really good for the students. It brought home the message that every child can learn but it takes a different environment sometimes to do so.

Senator Rhoads said he echoed the words of Representative Feeley and he wanted to ask to what extent have they been able to get parents involved. Mr. Orman said it was obviously an area for constant focus. Their parents have been tremendously involved. They find that sometimes mom is working two or three jobs and it is not a disinterest on her part in most cases. They found that if the school is flexible and willing to meet with parents outside the school hours, then parents are interested. Having meetings scheduled on parents' schedules and not the school's is a great help. The parents have heard all the bad things so what they try to do is during first months of school is give parents a call about something good that happened and this builds a good solid relationship. Mr. Emerson said that anyone that will sit before you and tell you they can't get their parents involved translates in his opinion to we won't get the parents involved.

Ms. Buecker said sometimes the situation is so severe that the parents say they don't know what to do to help their child. She said they get very positive responses. Mr. Emerson said they contact all the parents and know them on a first name basis. Parents have gone years with only hearing the negative things about their child. He said when teachers leave a good message on the answering machines they hear from the students about how they communicated and how the students are so proud when the parents encourage them after hearing good news. Parents want to hear good news also.

Senator Casebier said he hoped the committee could see why he wanted them to see this program. There are no throw away kids. He said he hoped more teachers through out the Commonwealth could experience this training because it is very exciting to be a part of this positive experience.

There being no further business before the subcommittee, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 AM. After the meeting the subcommittee took a tour of the Buckner complex.